

## **Book Review: The Church's Hope: The Reformed Doctrine of the End, vol. 2: The Coming of Christ**

The Coming of Christ, the second volume of *The Church's Hope: the Reformed Doctrine of the End*, completes Professor David Engelsma's thorough treatment and development of Reformed eschatology. Having devoted his first volume to the necessary task of clearing the ground of persistent millennial errors, the author now proceeds in eleven chapters to elucidate and expound the Bible's main teachings concerning the last days, the end of this present age, and the inauguration of the age to come.

The first half of the book occupies itself with a study of the precursory signs revealed primarily in Matthew 24. The precursory signs are the "forerunners" of the coming Christ. These signs consist of certain biblically designated occurrences in nature, in the nations of the world, and in the church, which occurrences indicate that Jesus Christ is coming, and coming quickly, just as He promised. These signs, like birth pangs of an expectant mother, increase in both frequency and intensity as the Day of Christ draws nearer. The author takes the reader through each sign revealed in Scripture, not only explaining them individually, but bringing out their interrelation with one another. For example, the author highlights how the outstanding sign, the sign of the preaching of the gospel, cutting as it does like double edge sword, is in fact one of the driving factors behind the increasing prevalence of apostasy and the eventual rise of Antichrist Himself. The author, in good biblical and Reformed fashion, sets forth the sovereignty of God over the end and all things pertaining to it. He sheds light on the comfort and hope that eschatology, rightly understood, brings to the faithful believer and church. The white horse of the gospel goes forth conquering and unconquered. The conquering Christ comes quickly, and His salvation is with Him. Believers are more than conquerors through Him that loved them. Even as the days grow darker—and we see it all around us—the Church's hope shines no less brightly, indeed, more brightly!

The second half of the book focuses on the rise of Antichrist and his swift downfall at the Second Coming of Christ. Just as Scripture itself tends toward the final consummation of all things on the day of Christ's second coming, so too this book builds up this ultimate hope of the church: the return of her Lord. The reader is given a sober description of Antichrist, who he will be, how he will rise, what power he shall wield, what short-lived kingdom he shall build, the part the false church will play, and the tribulation he shall bring upon the church. The fullness of Scripture's teaching on the subject is here explained. The reader who is interested in gaining a better understanding of difficult eschatological passages of Scripture, such as in Daniel and Revelation, will be well rewarded by reading this work.

The book's final chapters lead the reader through the coming triumph of Christ the King and His bride the Church. The great event toward which all history inexorably moves is the Second Coming of Christ, or *Parousia*. Upon the completion of His work of gathering the elect from the nations, the Lord Jesus will come again on the clouds of glory. His coming will be a real, visible coming, which every eye shall see. Whereas His first advent was marked by lowliness and meekness, Christ's Second Coming will be marked by power and majesty. His first advent was for the purpose of humbling Himself unto death to redeem His people. His Second Coming will be for the purpose of judgment and the final vindication of the kingdom and cause of Christ. After explaining the Bible's teaching on the *Parousia*, the book concludes with the last great works Jesus Christ shall perform after His Second Coming. These works are the general resurrection of the dead, the final judgment of all moral-rational creatures, and the inauguration of the eternal state, hell for the reprobate wicked, eternal life in the new creation for the elect. The last pages are filled with the Church's hope fulfilled. The glory God has prepared for those who love Him!

This volume is excellent. There are many points to recommend this book to the Christian reader. I limit myself to a few prominent things that stood out to this reviewer.

First, the book is *exegetically grounded and interpretively sound*. This was an outstanding characteristic of the first volume, and it is happily carried through in the second. The author draws eschatology from the Bible and develops it in harmony with the whole of Scripture and line with the Reformed Creeds. The author consistently supports his assertions with ample and appropriate scriptural proof. The interpretive principle that Scripture interprets Scripture is faithfully followed in the exposition of difficult passages. The outcome is a theological work of uncompromising fidelity to the Word of God. That is the highest praise that can be given to a work of theology. The reader may be assured that his understanding of the truth of God's Word will be enriched by reading this volume.

Second, this book is written with the sincere earnestness of a pastor who cares for Christ's sheep. The book explains eschatology with lucid brevity and simplicity. The author does not forget his audience. He is writing for the believer. His concerns are first of all for the believer's growth in understanding and the believer's spiritual edification. Eschatology is no mere academic matter, but is a matter of the utmost relevance to the Christian life here and now. The author impresses this reality upon the reader. The Bible's teaching on the End is truth in light of which the church must live right now. It is truth that should define the character of life here and now. In the exposition of doctrine the practical application is not forgotten. Through the printed page, the author teaches, warns, exhorts, and comforts as a faithful pastor who loves God's people.

Third, this volume, like the first, never loses sight of its overall theme: the Church's hope. The undercurrent the reader feels in each chapter is hope. Even as the reader is led through the Bible's unsettling description of Antichrist and the dreadful events surrounding him, hope remains the keynote. The hope of the Church is hope that maketh not ashamed.

In sum, Professor Engelsma's second volume, the Coming of Christ, is highly recommended. The Christian reader who wants his understanding of the end times to be shaped and informed by the Word of God, rather than the imaginations of men, will find this book to be exactly what he is looking for.